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FM AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0032
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KHARTOUM 000275

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/SPG, AF/EPS, EB/IFD, AND EB/ESC
DEPT PLS PASS USAID FOR AFR, AND ALSO PASS USAID

SIPDIS
SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [MARR](#) [MCAP](#) [MOPS](#) [SU](#)

SUBJECT: JEM LEADER COMMENTS ON DOWNED HELICOPTER AND SAF MOVEMENTS

REF: KHARTOUM 266, KHARTOUM 269

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: On February 25, Dr. Tahir Adam, the Speaker of the Legislative Council of the Justice Equality Movement (JEM), told econoff by satellite phone t\$`estroyed by JEM within one week. SAF, however, publicly denied losing any aircraft to rebel fire. Adam also gave information regarding SAF troop movements and added that JEM has unsuccessfully attempted to contact the Chinese Special Envoy and the U.S. END SUMMARY.

2. (SBU) Adam claimed that SAF troops, supported by janjaweed, continue to attack JEM forces in West Darfur. Adam stated that Sirba, Abu Siraj, and Silea had been completely burned and destroyed and that SAF continued to attack other areas near El-Geneina and Jebel Moun. "There has been extensive displacement of people from the area with people fleeing to Chad and other surrounding areas," he said.

JEM ALLEGEDLY DOWNS 3 HELICOPTERS

3. (SBU) Adam also alleged that on February 24, government forces attacked JEM near Jebel Moun with seven heavy artillery, two Antonov airplanes, and one helicopter. According to Adam, JEM forces delivered a direct hit with its own artillery to a SAF helicopter near Kundube (15 kilometers north of Al-Geneina) resulting in its eventual crash. (Note: Local press, such as Al-Sudani, reported on February 25 that a SAF helicopter crashed north of El-Geneina, but SAF attributed the loss to technical failure, rather than a JEM attack. The reports said that the helicopter made an emergency landing after which it burst into flames. One SAF spokesman is noted as asking, "How can we receive artillery from an area that we totally control?" End Note.) Adam claimed that this is the third SAF helicopter downed by JEM forces within one week. However, UNAMID has not verified JEM's claims, and has issued instructions to its own field officers to carefully verify any rebel claims to military successes.

SAF BUILDUP, INCLUDING TANKS

4. (SBU) Adam said that the SAF troop buildup continues, specifying that four days ago, SAF forces were deployed to the city of Bolo, northwest of Al-Fasher. According to Adam, SAF now has 125 land cruiser vehicles, 120 military vehicles mounted with heavy weapons, 15 fuel tankers, and 25 tanks near Bolo. Adam stated, "This is the first time that the Sudanese Army is trying to use tanks against us." Adam also claimed that SAF shelling of the Jebel Moun area continues. According to Adam, on February 24, SAF forces killed three JEM soldiers (including one commander) and 27 civilians (20 men and 7 women) in the town of Kopt near Jebel Moun.

CONTACTING CHINA AND THE U.S.

5. (SBU) According to Adam, JEM representatives in London have tried numerous times to meet the Chinese. "We were always

unsuccessful and we have given up trying to engage them," said Adam. He also stated that on November 27, 2007 JEM representatives delivered a letter to the U.S. Embassy in London putting forth their priorities and requesting a meeting with Embassy officials. According to Adam, JEM will continue to seek more interaction with the U.S. as, "We look with high regard at the American authorities and we appreciate all the efforts by the Americans. The U.S. has been the strongest supporter of the people of Darfur."

¶6. (SBU) COMMENT: The Sudanese Armed Forces has a track record of attributing helicopter crashes to "mechanical problems." Although the helicopter destroyed on February 24 was most likely shot down by rebels, we should treat all of JEM's claims with healthy skepticism. JEM has repeatedly exaggerated and distorted facts for its own self-promotion and bears major responsibility in provoking this government offensive after JEM attacked and seized several lightly-defended Darfur towns. JEM's claim of downing two other helicopters earlier in the week has not been independently verified, nor has the SAF made any mention of the loss of additional assets.

¶7. (SBU) Comment continued: Adam displayed a strong command of detail, a high level of English proficiency, and an unexpected amount of sophistication for one of Darfur's rebels in the field. Adam is likely one of the core individuals contributing to JEM's strategic communication program, one of the strongest of any Darfur rebel group, though one that also uses the media to announce exaggerated claims, boast of its military prowess, bring about disproportionate Government counter-attacks and ultimately sow violence and chaos to the detriment of Darfur's innocent civilians. END COMMENT.

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¶8. (U) BIO NOTE: Dr. Tahir Adam is the Speaker of the Legislative Council of the Justice and Equality Movement. He is from An-Nahud in North Kordofan, and claims to be close friends with other JEM leaders from the area, such as Ibrahim Abu Rannat. Adam later studied at Khartoum University and has published a number of articles (such as "JEM's Vision for a New Sudan") on websites such as sudantribune.com and sudaneseonline.com.

FERNANDEZ